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JC03 Rec'd PCT/PTC

21 JUN 2001

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June 21, 2001

## BOX PCT

Commissioner for Patents  
Washington, D.C. 20231

PCT/BE99/00084  
-filed July 2, 1999

Re: Application of Alain VANDERGHEYNST, Jean VAN VLIET and  
Eduard PELCKMANS  
PROCESS FOR MANUFACTURING (U,Pu)O<sub>2</sub> MIXED OXIDE NUCLEAR  
FUEL PELLETS FROM NON-FREE-FLOWING UO<sub>2</sub> POWDER  
Our Ref: Q64867

Dear Sir:

The following documents and fees are submitted herewith in connection with the above application for the purpose of entering the National stage under 35 U.S.C. § 371 and in accordance with Chapter II of the Patent Cooperation Treaty:

- an executed Declaration and Power of Attorney.
- an English translation of the International Application.
- 3 sheets of drawings (Figs. 1-3).
- an English translation of Article 19 claim amendments.
- an English translation of Article 34 amendments (annexes to the IPER).
- an executed Assignment and PTO 1595 form.
- a Form PTO-1449 listing the ISR references, and a complete copy of each reference.
- a Preliminary Amendment

It is assumed that the International Search Report, will be supplied directly by the International Bureau, but if further copies are needed, the undersigned can easily provide them upon request.

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June 20, 2001

**Please see the attached PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT before calculating the filing fee.**

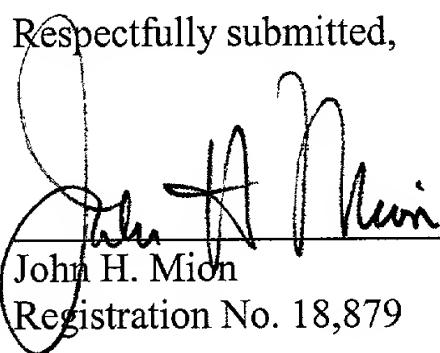
The Government filing fee is calculated as follows:

Total claims	<u>11</u>	-	<u>20</u>	=		x \$18.00	=	\$0.00
Independent claims	<u>1</u>	-	<u>3</u>	=		x \$80.00	=	\$0.00
Base Fee								\$860.00
<b>TOTAL FILING FEE</b>								\$860.00
<b>Recordation of Assignment</b>								\$40.00
<b>TOTAL FEE</b>								\$900.00

Checks for the statutory filing fee of \$860.00 and Assignment recordation fee of \$40.00 are attached. You are also directed and authorized to charge or credit any difference or overpayment to Deposit Account No. 19-4880. The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any fees under 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.16, 1.17 and 1.492 which may be required during the entire pendency of the application to Deposit Account No. 19-4880. A duplicate copy of this transmittal letter is attached.

There is no claim to priority.

Respectfully submitted,

  
John H. Mion  
Registration No. 18,879

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531 Rec'd PCT/F 21 JUN 2001

PATENT APPLICATION  
Q-64867

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

In re application of

Alain DERGHEYNST et al

**PCT/BE89/00084**  
filed July 2, 1999

Appln. No. (NOT YET KNOWN)

**Confirmation No. (NOT YET KNOWN)**

Filed: June 21, 2001

For: PROCESS FOR MANUFACTURING (U,Pu)O<sub>2</sub> MIXED OXIDE NUCLEAR FUEL  
PELLETS FROM NON-FREE-

**PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT**

Commissioner for Patents  
Washington, D.C. 20231

Sir:

Preliminary to examination of the above-identified Application, please make the  
following amendments:

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

**The claims are amended as follows:**

5. (Amended) The process as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that it furthermore  
comprises particle size selection by sieving (32) of the granulated UO<sub>2</sub> before it is used.

8. (Amended) The process as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that, for said  
granulation of the non-free-flowing UO<sub>2</sub>, a lubricant is added to it.

9. (Amended) The process as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that, for said  
granulation of the non-free-flowing UO<sub>2</sub>, a binder is added to it.

PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT  
PCT/BE99/00084, FILED JULY 2, 1999

10. (Amended) The process as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that the sintering (7) of the fuel pellets in an atmosphere of argon and hydrogen is carried out at a temperature between 1600 and 1760°C, the argon possibly being replaced with nitrogen.

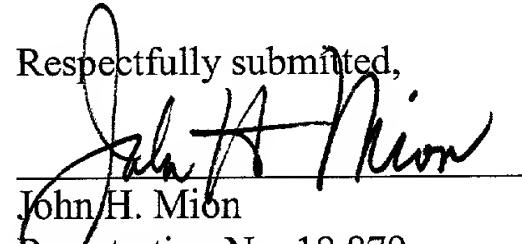
11. (Amended) The process as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that, during the sintering (7), the oxygen partial pressure is adjusted, preferably by adjusting the H<sub>2</sub>/H<sub>2</sub>O ratio in a flushing gas, in order to improve the interdiffusion of the PuO<sub>2</sub> and UO<sub>2</sub> oxides.

PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT  
PCT/BE99/00084, FILED JULY 2, 1999

**REMARKS**

The above amendments have been made to eliminate all multiple dependent claims (both proper and improper), thereby both ensuring examination of all claims on the merits in the first Office Action and eliminating the need for a multiple dependent claim fee.

Respectfully submitted,

  
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PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT  
PCT/BE99/00084, FILED JULY 2, 1999

**APPENDIX**

**VERSION WITH MARKING TO SHOW CHANGES MADE**

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

**The claims are amended as follows:**

5. (Amended) The process as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 4~~claim 1, characterized in that it furthermore comprises particle size selection by sieving (32) of the granulated UO<sub>2</sub> before it is used.

8. (Amended) The process as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 7~~claim 1, characterized in that, for said granulation of the non-free-flowing UO<sub>2</sub>, a lubricant is added to it.

9. (Amended) The process as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 8~~claim 1, characterized in that, for said granulation of the non-free-flowing UO<sub>2</sub>, a binder is added to it.

10. (Amended) The process as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 9~~claim 1, characterized in that the sintering (7) of the fuel pellets in an atmosphere of argon and hydrogen is carried out at a temperature between 1600 and 1760°C, the argon possibly being replaced with nitrogen.

11. (Amended) The process as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 10~~claim 1, characterized in that, during the sintering (7), the oxygen partial pressure is adjusted, preferably by adjusting the H<sub>2</sub>/H<sub>2</sub>O ratio in ~~the~~a flushing gas, in order to improve the interdiffusion of the PuO<sub>2</sub> and UO<sub>2</sub> oxides.

Process for manufacturing (U,Pu)O<sub>2</sub> mixed oxide nuclear  
fuel pellets from non-free-flowing UO<sub>2</sub> powder

The present invention relates to a process for  
5 manufacturing a (U,Pu)O<sub>2</sub> mixed powder from non-free-  
flowing UO<sub>2</sub> powders.

The manufacture of fuel for light-water  
reactors, based on uranium and plutonium oxides,  
generally called MOX fuel, has been the subject of  
10 various developments associated with the desire to  
recycl plutonium recovered during spent fuel  
reprocessing.

The manufacture and irradiation of MOX fuel in  
light-water reactors are now considered to be a  
15 solution for providing reasonable resistance to the  
proliferation of plutonium present in a form separated  
from the fission products, whether this plutonium is  
either of civilian or military origin.

Several processes for manufacturing MOX fuel  
20 have been developed over the last two decades, some of  
the processes involving the complete milling of the UO<sub>2</sub>  
and PuO<sub>2</sub> powders in order to provide an intimate blend,  
while others are limited to milling only a fraction of  
these powders.

25 The MIMAS (standing for MICronization and  
MAster blend) process, which was developed by the  
Applicant of the present invention (see figure 1),  
comprises the micronization, by milling, of only a  
fraction of the final blend and uses two successive  
30 blending operations to achieve isotopic homogenization  
and to take advantage of the use of free-flowing UO<sub>2</sub>  
incoming products (especially to ensure that the dies  
of the presses used for pelletizing are properly  
filled). Using free-flowing UO<sub>2</sub> powders in the second  
35 blending operation and limiting the milling to only the  
first blending operation simplify the manufacture (for  
example by dispensing with the operations of  
precompacting/granulating or spheroidization of the

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mixed oxide blend) and have greatly simplified, at the start of industrial implementation, the qualification of MOX fuel by users and the licensing process by the Nuclear Safety Authorities (thanks to the similarity in behavior between this MOX fuel and UO<sub>2</sub> fuel).

Various versions of the MIMAS process have been applied, sometimes under names different from MIMAS, but all characterized by two successive blending operations, the second of which uses free-flowing UO<sub>2</sub>.

UO<sub>2</sub> which serves as feed material in the manufacture of enriched-uranium fuel and, in the great majority of cases, in the manufacture of MOX fuel, is obtained by the conversion of uranium hexafluoride. There are industrial conversion processes which produce free-flowing UO<sub>2</sub> powder. This is especially the case with two industrial conversion processes using a wet route, known in the art by the respective names "AUC", coming from the intermediate product (Ammonium Uranyl Carbonate), and "TU2", coming from the uranium transformation unit in which the conversion is carried out. One of the drawbacks of these wet conversion processes is the production of a large amount of liquid effluents which have to be treated before discharge. The wet conversion processes, some of which do not produce free-flowing UO<sub>2</sub>, are gradually being replaced with dry processes which allow the gaseous effluents to be recycled but which generally produce non-free-flowing UO<sub>2</sub> powder.

For the purpose of diversifying the sources of UO<sub>2</sub> powder for manufacturing MOX fuel by MIMAS-type processes, it is therefore useful to be able to employ non-free-flowing UO<sub>2</sub> powders.

Non-free-flowing UO<sub>2</sub> powder conditioning processes, for transforming it into free-flowing UO<sub>2</sub> granules, and therefore having properties suitable for feeding a pelletizing press, are known. Various mechanical granulation processes, such as precompaction-granulation or agglomeration-

spheroidization, have been developed and are used on an industrial scale in  $\text{UO}_2$  fuel manufacturing plants.

Experience has shown that these granulation processes produce granules of insufficient mechanical strength for correct implementation of the second blending operation which characterizes the MIMAS processes and similar processes. Under the optimum operation of the second blender, the granules are damaged and the flowability of the secondary blend is impaired: the fuel pellets which result therefrom suffer from major defects (excessive variability in the physical properties of the product, local differential shrinkage defects, etc.). Alternatively, if the method of operating the second blender is modified so as to achieve gentle mixing of the powders to be blended, or if the apparatus used for the second blending is modified for the same purpose, the uniformity of distribution of the plutonium within the fuel may be impaired and the MOX pellets thus produced no longer meet the maximum plutonium content variability criteria.

To avoid the abovementioned drawbacks, the process for manufacturing MOX fuel from non-free-flowing  $\text{UO}_2$  powder, which is the subject matter of the invention, comprises a mechanical granulation treatment of the non-free-flowing  $\text{UO}_2$  powder, which does not modify the chemical properties (such as a stoichiometry) and morphological properties (such as the particle size) of the  $\text{UO}_2$  powder, but which does nevertheless ensure the mechanical strength and flowability that are required to successfully carry out the second blending operation and the pelletizing operation, respectively.

The invention thus obviates the need to supply the MIMAS-type processes with free-flowing  $\text{UO}_2$  powders as feed materials.

According to one advantageous method of implementing the invention, non-free-flowing  $\text{UO}_2$  powder is used, one part of which is used, as it is, for

incorporation in the first blend and one part of which undergoes a granulation treatment before being incorporated into the second blend.

In a variant, as a nonlimiting example, said granulation treatment may also be applied to the non-free-flowing  $\text{UO}_2$  fraction fed in the first blend

In order to avoid the drawback of the abovementioned lack of mechanical strength of  $\text{UO}_2$  granulated by one of the usual conditioning processes, 10 the mechanical treatment according to the invention is carried out either by forcing the non-free-flowing  $\text{UO}_2$  powder through a screen or sieve, or by compressing this powder into tablets under a high pressure, as required for obtaining suitable non-friability 15 properties, and then crushing said tablets. When necessary, one or more binders and/or lubricants may be added beforehand to the  $\text{UO}_2$  powder.

Further details and features of the invention will become apparent from the claims and from the description of the drawings, which are appended to the present specification and which illustrate, by way of nonlimiting examples, the manufacturing process according to the invention.

Figure 1 shows schematically the steps in the manufacture of mixed oxide fuel according to a known process of the MIMAS type.

Figure 2 shows schematically the steps in the manufacture of mixed oxide fuel according to a process of the invention.

30 Figure 3 shows schematically variants of the process according to the invention.

In the various figures, the same reference notations denote identical or similar components.

The process of the invention, for the use of  
35 non-free-flowing  $UO_2$  powder, comprises basically a  
process for the manufacture of  $(U,Pu)O_2$  mixed oxide  
fuel pellets, that is to say overall (figure 2):

- dosing and first blending (step 1) of PuO<sub>2</sub> powders and/or UO<sub>2</sub> powders and/or fuel manufacturing scrap;
- micronization (step 2) of this first blend, particularly by milling, and forced sieving (step 3) of its product, for example through a 250 µm screen mesh;
- additional dosing and second blending (step 4) of the first blend thus treated, UO<sub>2</sub> and, where appropriate, fuel manufacturing scrap;
- addition, and blending with the resulting second blend of one or more lubricants and/or poreformers (step 5), the latter step possibly being completely or partly combined with step 4;
- compression (step 6) of the second blend into pellets using pelletizing presses ; and
- sintering (step 7) of the pellets thus formed, preferably in an atmosphere of moistened argon (or nitrogen) and hydrogen.

This mixed oxide fuel pellet manufacturing process may also usually include, for the pellets thus obtained, steps of:

- dry grinding (step 8);
- visual inspection (step 9);
- stacking up to length (step 10);
- loading the pellets into a cladding and welding the latter so as to form a fuel rod (step 11, figure 1);

30

- pressurizing the rods;
- nondestructive testing/examination of the rods (step 12); and
- assembling of the rods (step 13).

Said process of the invention furthermore includes (figure 2) a prior mechanical granulation treatment of all or part of the nonflowing  $UO_2$  (step 29). This treatment may comprise, for example:

- either (figure 3) steps of compressing the non-free-flowing  $\text{UO}_2$  into tablets (step 30) and of

crushing these tablets (step 31) and, where appropriate, of sieving the crushed material (step 32) in order to form free-flowing granules having properties suitable for being incorporated as the basic constituent in the second blending operation (step 4) or, in a variant, in both blending operations (steps 1 and 4), while maintaining the original chemical composition and original particle size of the original  $\text{UO}_2$ ;

- or an agglomeration/precompaction/granulation step by forcing the non-free-flowing  $\text{UO}_2$  powder through a screen or sieve (step 29), the amount of additive(s), the mesh size of the screen or sieve and the pressure exerted on the powder being adjusted in order to form granules having the suitable properties described above.

A few nonlimiting parameters of the pellet manufacturing process are given below by way of example:

- batch/campaign operation rather than continuous operation;
- plutonium content of the first blend: 20 to 40% (step 1);
- milling (step 4) in 60 kg batches for a minimum effective time of 5 hours;
- use of non-free-flowing  $\text{UO}_2$  powders coming from a wet conversion (for example, ex-ADU or ammonium diuranate powder) or from a dry conversion (said conversions being known to those skilled in the art);
- addition of 0.2 to 0.5% of zinc stearate and 0 to 1% of an AZB pore former (known to those skilled in the art);
- pelletizing compression (step 6) at a pressure between 400 and 700 MPa;
- sintering (step 7) for at least 4 hours at a temperature between 1600 and 1760°C, in an

argon atmosphere containing 5% hydrogen, with an H<sub>2</sub>/H<sub>2</sub>O ratio of 10 to 30; and dry centerless grinding (step 8).

By way of nonlimiting example, the compression step (step 30) may be carried out at a pressure of between 50 and 200 MPa, this being tailored according to the characteristics of the non-free-flowing powder. These pressures are therefore higher than the granulation pressures (4 to 10 MPa) generally used in UO<sub>2</sub> nuclear fuel manufacturing plants. Some binder and/or lubricant, both well known to those skilled in the art, may be incorporated into the non-free-flowing UO<sub>2</sub> powder before compression: by way of nonlimiting example, the compression may thus be carried out at a pressure of between 40 and 100 MPa.

Also by way of nonlimiting example, the aforementioned tablets may be crushed in one or more jaw crushes or roll mills of 200-250 µm aperture. This crushing may be followed by sieving if the crusher lets through, or runs the risk of letting through, granules having a size greater than 250 µm. The fines possibly resulting from the crushing may usefully be incorporated as raw material into the first blending operation (step 1).

By way of yet another nonlimiting example, the operation of forcing the powder through a sieve (step 29) may be carried out in a machine of the kind used in MIMAS-type processes (step 3) to fill the first blend (after the micronization of step 2) before the second blending (step 4). Such machines, which combine agglomeration/precompaction upstream of the sieve and control of the maximum granule size by passing the powder through this same sieve, may produce granules of the desired characteristics directly.

Experience has shown the Applicant that a non-free-flowing powder treated according to the process forming the subject matter of the invention can be used in existing MOX manufacturing plants, by adjusting the parameters of this second blending operation (step 4),

the pelletizing (step 6) and the sintering (step 7), within the adjustment limits routinely used to optimize the manufacturing process according to the characteristics of the various free-flowing UO<sub>2</sub> powders 5 used for MOX fuel manufacture.

The process of the invention therefore makes it possible to extend the range of UO<sub>2</sub> powders which can be used to manufacture MOX fuel, without loosing the benefit of the similarity between the MOX fuel produced 10 according to the invention and the UO<sub>2</sub> fuel manufactured on an industrial scale by the processes known hitherto, starting from the same non-free-flowing UO<sub>2</sub> powder.

It should be understood that the present 15 invention is in no way limited to the methods of implementation described above and that many modifications may be made thereto without departing from the scope of the claims given hereafter.

The non-free-flowing UO<sub>2</sub> conditioning process 20 may especially be applied to UO<sub>2</sub> coming from a conversion other than the conversion of uranium hexafluoride into UO<sub>2</sub>.

INVENTION

Claims

1. A process for manufacturing  $(U, Pu)O_2$  mixed oxide nuclear fuel pellets,  
5 - comprising:  
\* dosing and first blending (1) of  $PuO_2$  and/or  $UO_2$  powders and/or fuel manufacturing scrap;  
\* micronization (2) and forced sieving (3) of this  
10 first blend;  
\* additional dosing and second blending (4) of the first blend thus treated,  $UO_2$  and possibly scrap;  
\* addition and blending of lubricants and/or poreformers (5), separately or in combination with  
15 the second blending step (4);  
\* pelletizing (6) of the second blend; and  
\* sintering (7) of the pellets thus formed; and  
- furthermore comprising, for at least one portion of the  $UO_2$  powders:  
20 \* selection of non-free-flowing  $UO_2$ ; and  
\* mechanical granulation treatment (29) of the  $UO_2$  so as to make it free-flowing, before the  $UO_2$  is used as granules in at least said second blending operation.

25 2. The process as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that it comprises, for said granulation treatment:  
\* compression (30) of the nonflowing  $UO_2$  into tablets at a pressure greater than that used for  
30 the usual  $UO_2$  granulation;  
\* crushing (31) of the tablets obtained, until a flowing crushed material has been formed; and  
\* use of at least one portion of this flowing crushed material for said second blending  
35 operation (4).

3. The process as claimed in claim 2, characterized in that the compression (30) is carried out at a pressure of between 40 and 200 MPa.

4. The process as claimed in claim 2, characterized in that a jaw crusher or a roll mill is used for the crushing step (31).

5. The process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 4, characterized in that it furthermore comprises particle size selection by sieving (32) of the granulated  $\text{UO}_2$  before it is used.

10. The process as claimed in claim 5, characterized in that the granulated  $\text{UO}_2$  is separated, by the sieving (32), into at least two fractions of different particle sizes, the finest fraction possibly being introduced into the aforementioned first blending operation (1) whereas the other fraction is incorporated into the second blending operation (4).

15. The process as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that it comprises, in order to carry out said granulation of the non-free-flowing  $\text{UO}_2$ , an operation to force the latter through a screen or sieve, the amount of additive(s), the mesh size of the screen or sieve and the pressure exerted on the powder all being adjusted so as to form granules having the appropriate properties.

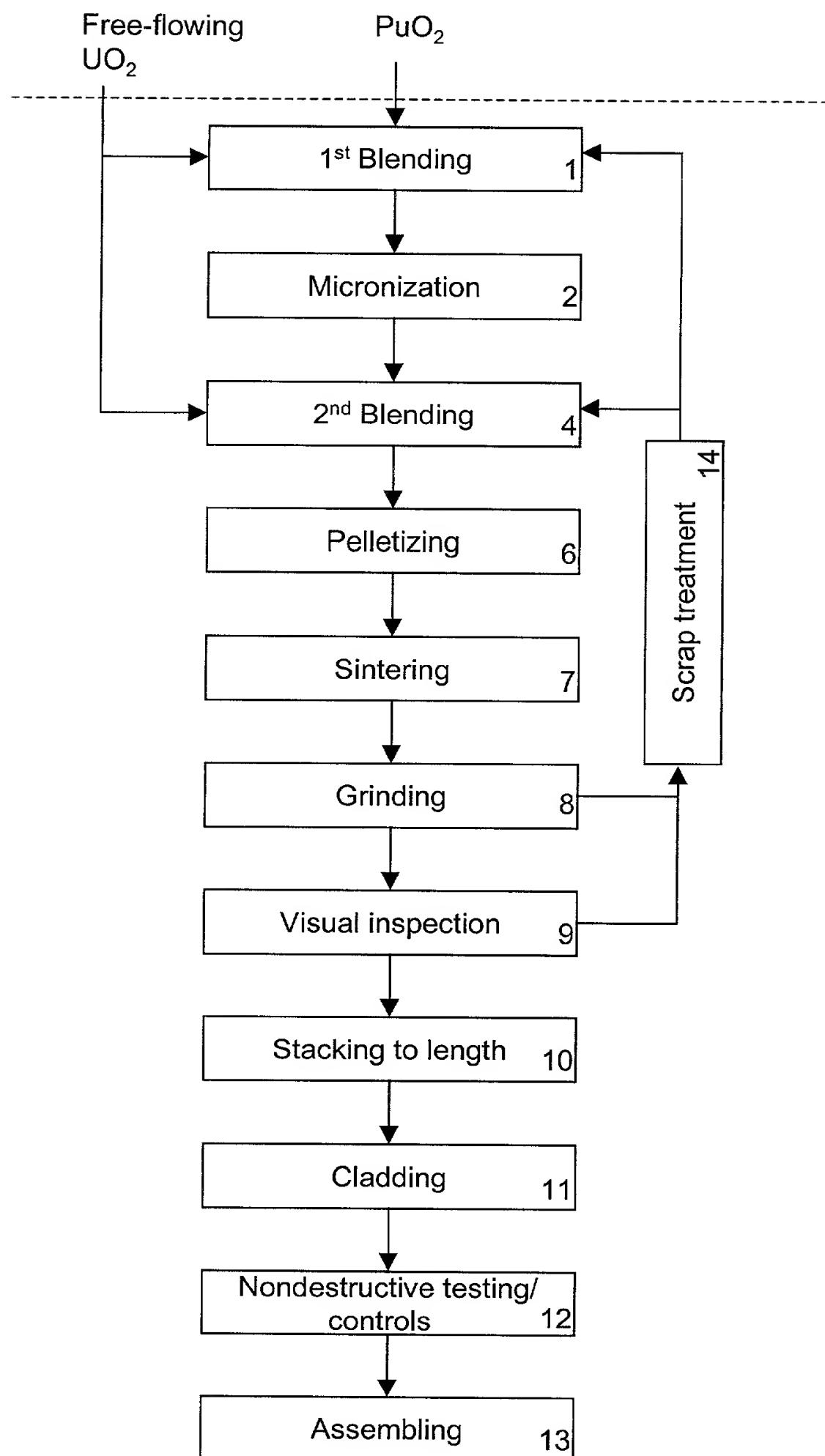
20. The process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 7, characterized in that, for said granulation of the non-free-flowing  $\text{UO}_2$ , a lubricant is added to it.

25. The process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 8, characterized in that, for said granulation of the non-free-flowing  $\text{UO}_2$ , a binder is added to it.

30. The process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 9, characterized in that the sintering (7) of the fuel pellets in an atmosphere of argon and hydrogen is carried out at a temperature between 1600 and 1760°C, the argon possibly being replaced with nitrogen.

35. The process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 10, characterized in that, during the sintering (7), the oxygen partial pressure is adjusted, preferably by adjusting the  $\text{H}_2/\text{H}_2\text{O}$  ratio in the flushing gas, in order to improve the interdiffusion of the  $\text{PuO}_2$  and  $\text{UO}_2$  oxides.

## Feed Materials



Mixed oxide fuel  
manufacturing process

Figure 1

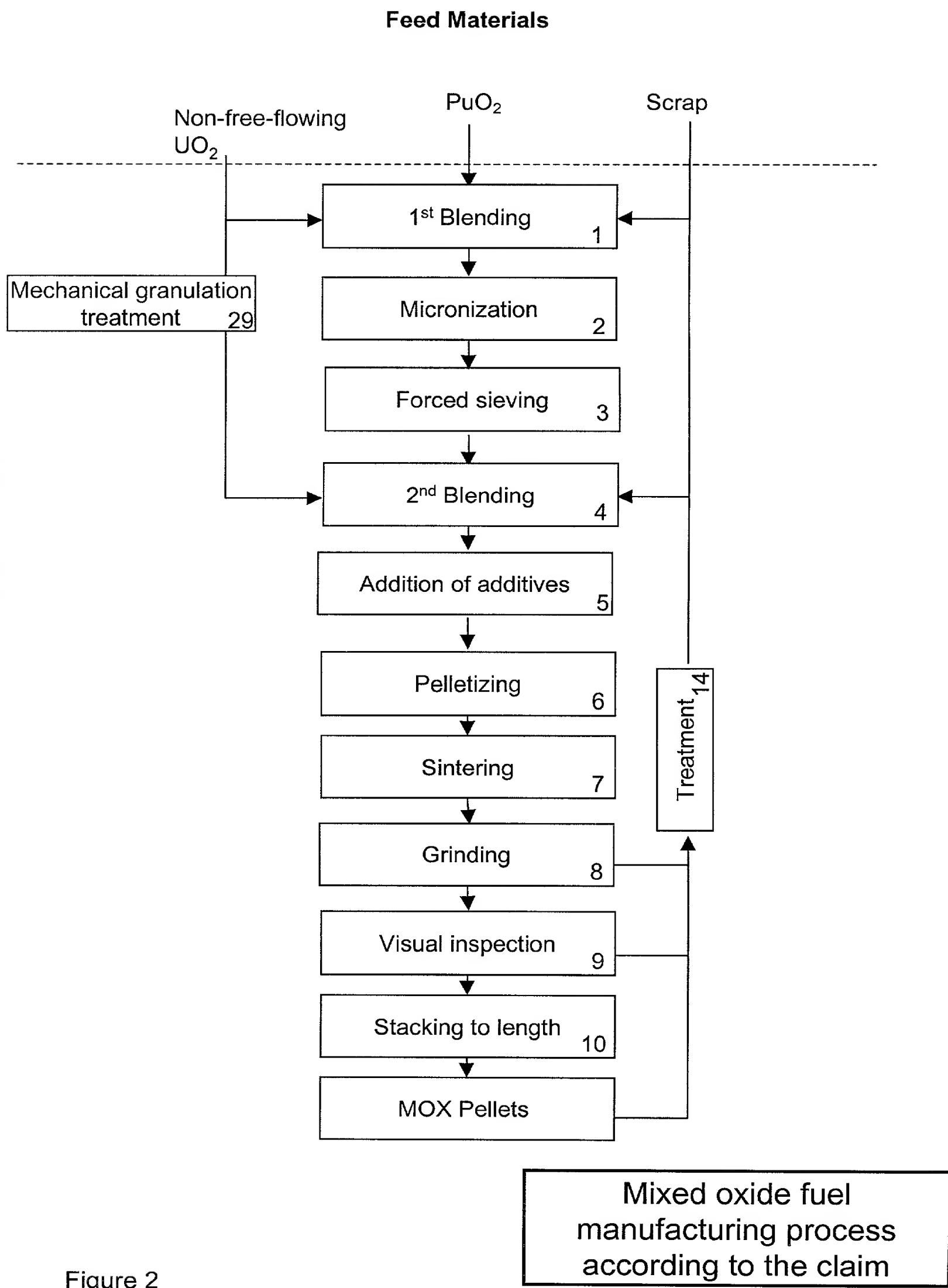


Figure 2

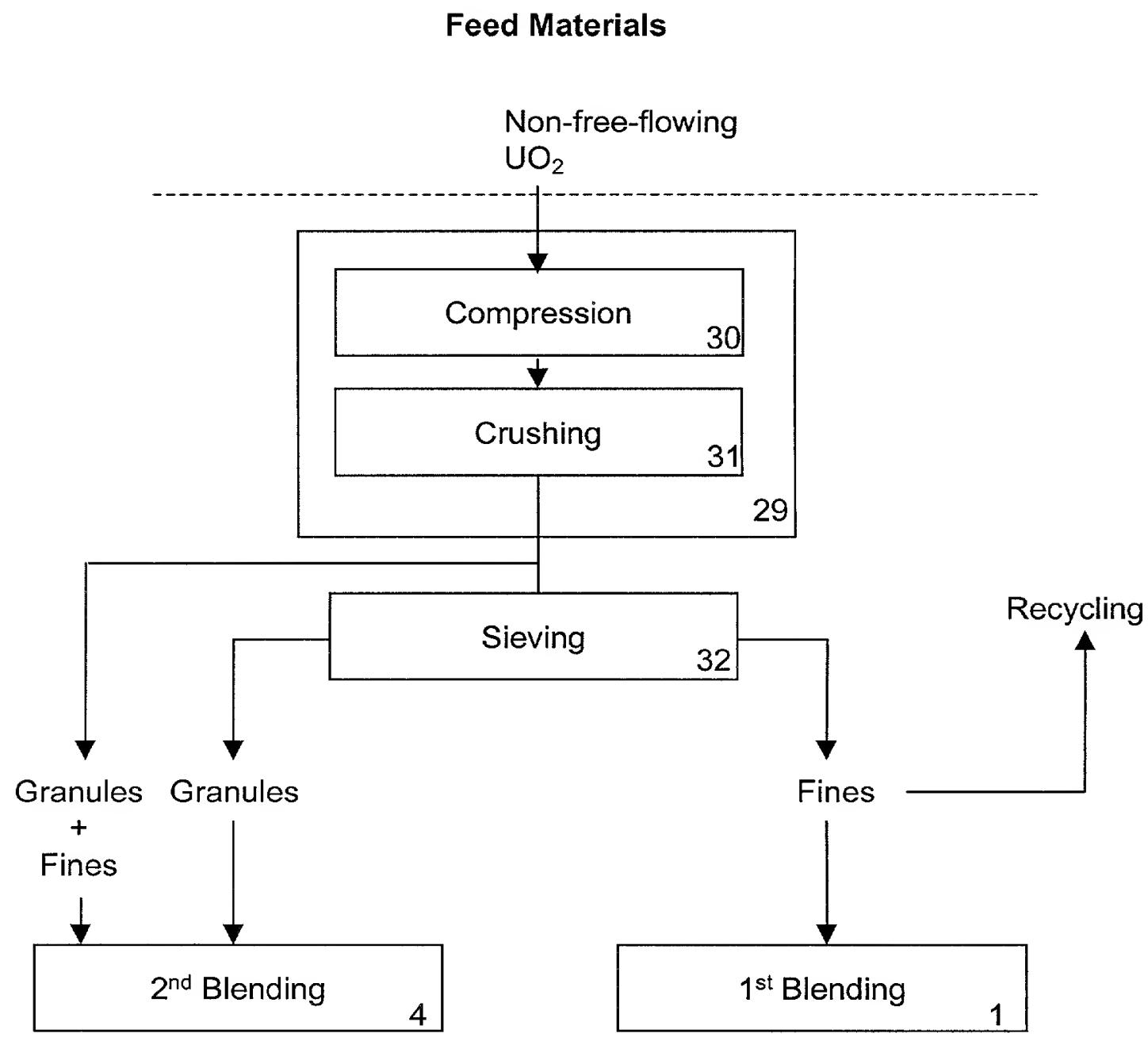


Figure 3

Variant of the mechanical  
granulation treatment  
of non-flowing UO<sub>2</sub> powders

DECLARATION AND POWER OF ATTORNEY

As a below named inventor, I hereby declare that my residence, post office address and citizenship are as stated below next to my name; that I verify believe I am the original, first and sole inventor (if only one name is listed below) or an original, first and joint inventor (if plural names are listed below) of the subject matter claimed and for which a patent is sought in the application entitled: Process for manufacturing  $(U, Pu)O_2$  mixed oxide nuclear fuel pellets from non-free-flowing  $UO_2$  powder

which application is:

the attached application  
(for original application)

Application No. PCT/BE99/00084  
filed July 2, 1999, and amended on

(for declaration not accompanying application)

that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the specification of the above-identified application, including the claims, as amended by any amendment referred to above; that I acknowledge my duty to disclose information of which I am aware and which is material to the patentability of this application as defined in 37 C.F.R. 1.56, that I hereby claim priority benefits under Title 35, United States Code §119(a)-(d) or §365(b) of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate, §119(e) of any United States provisional application(s), or §365(a) of any PCT International application which designated at least one country other than the United States of America, listed below and have also identified below any foreign application for patent or inventor's certificate or of any PCT International application having a filing date before that of the application on which priority is claimed:

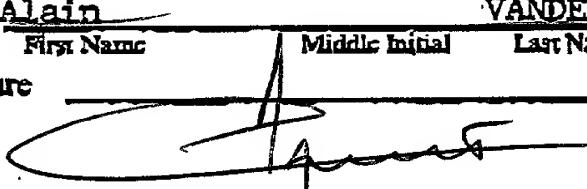
Application Number	Country	Filing Date	Priority Claimed	
			Yes	No
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I hereby claim the benefit under 35 United States Code §120 of any United States application(s), or §365(c) of any PCT International application designating the United States, listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in a listed prior United States or PCT International application in the manner provided by the first paragraph of Title 35, United States Code, §112, I acknowledge my duty to disclose any information material to the patentability of this application as defined in 37 C.F.R. 1.56 which occurred between the filing date of the prior application and the national or PCT international filing date of this application:

Application No.	Filing Date	Status

I hereby appoint John H. Mion, Reg. No. 18,879; Thomas J. Macpeak, Reg. No. 19,292; Robert J. Seas, Jr., Reg. No. 21,092; Darryl Mexic, Reg. No. 23,063; Robert V. Sloan, Reg. No. 22,775; Peter D. Oleky, Reg. No. 24,513; J. Frank Osha, Reg. No. 24,625; Waddell A. Biggart, Reg. No. 24,861; Louis Gubinsky, Reg. No. 24,835; Neil B. Siegel, Reg. No. 25,200; David I. Cushing, Reg. No. 28,703; John R. Inge, Reg. No. 26,916; Joseph J. Ruch, Jr., Reg. No. 26,577; Sheldon L. Landsman, Reg. No. 25,430; Richard C. Turner, Reg. No. 29,710; Howard L. Bernstein, Reg. No. 25,665; Alan J. Kasper, Reg. No. 25,426; Kenneth J. Burchfiel, Reg. No. 31,333; Gordon Kit, Reg. No. 30,764; Susan J. Mack, Reg. No. 30,951; Frank L. Bernstein, Reg. No. 31,484; Mark Boland, Reg. No. 32,197; William H. Mandir, Reg. No. 32,156; Brian W. Hamm, Reg. No. 32,778; Abraham J. Rosner, Reg. No. 33,276; Bruce E. Kramer, Reg. No. 33,725; Paul F. Neils, Reg. No. 33,102; Brett S. Sylvester, Reg. No. 32,765; Robert M. Masters, Reg. No. 35,603; George F. Lehnigk, Reg. No. 36,359; John T. Callahan, Reg. No. 32,507 and Steven M. Gruskin, Reg. No. 36,818; my attorneys to prosecute this application and to transact all business in the Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith, and request that all correspondence about the application be addressed to SUGHRUE, MION, ZINN, MACPEAK & SEAS, PLLC, 2100 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037-3213.

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issuing thereon.

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